

# Options with performing arts (dance/drama)

## Your skills

All performing arts courses equip you with specific skills relating to the discipline(s) that you have chosen. Some focus on one particular area from the start, while others give a broader overview before you specialise.

Courses develop your original talent, while also giving you new techniques to enhance your performance, e.g. movement, improvisation and breathing. They often involve acquiring new skills such as mime (actors and dancers), choreography (dancers) or additional instruments and styles (musicians). Some courses also provide you with relevant technical understanding: how to use sophisticated sound and lighting equipment or how to stage a production.

Most courses introduce you to the history of individual performing arts and the different influences that these have absorbed. You also develop an understanding of related subjects such as anatomy, sociology, media and culture.

Performance skills and stagecraft are also developed through giving real performances - both internally and to the public.

Studying performing arts also gives you a range of skills sought after by all types of employers:

- confidence;
- self-presentation;
- teamwork and collaboration;
- time management and organisational skills;
- self-awareness;
- self-discipline;
- open mindedness to move beyond boundaries and experiment with different ideas;
- communication skills;
- analytical, critical and research skills;
- the ability to cope with criticism and learn from it;
- stamina.

Consider the skills developed on your course as well as through your other activities, such as paid work, volunteering, family responsibilities, sport, membership of societies, leadership roles, etc. Think about how these can be used as evidence of your skills and personal attributes. Then you can start to market and sell who you *really* are, identify what you may be lacking and consider how to improve your profile. Take a look at [applications, CVs and interviews](#) for some useful tips.

## Job options

### Jobs directly related to your degree

- [Actor](#) - uses speech, movement, expression and body language to convey characters, emotions and situations. May perform before a live theatre audience or through audio, TV and film recordings.
- [Choreographer](#) - develops new dance steps, routines and complete productions, interpreting existing works as well as generating new themes, formats, ideas and storylines. Most choreographers have trained or worked as dancers and come to this as a second career.
- [Dance movement therapist](#), [Dramatherapist](#) or [Music therapist](#) - combines dance, drama or music with therapeutic techniques to help patients to recover from emotional or physical conditions. Extensive training in therapy and counselling is needed after your performing arts degree.
- [Community arts worker](#) - engages various community groups, often from underprivileged backgrounds, in

creating, adapting and performing different types of work. These include plays, festivals, carnivals, operas and musicals, which may be given a local slant.

- [Dancer](#) - may work in classical ballet or in other forms such as musical theatre, jazz dance, disco or cabaret. Most work is stage based, but film and video is an occasional possibility.
- [Secondary school teacher](#) - teaches dance, drama or music to 11-18 year-olds, giving some a broad general education in these areas and preparing others for examinations such as GCSE and A-level. Private teaching for professional examinations is also possible.

### Jobs where your degree would be useful

- [Arts administrator](#) - manages, promotes and organises the running of arts premises, schemes and bodies. This could include deciding on seasonal programmes, marketing, obtaining or providing funding, budgeting and finance. Can enter with theatre experience or through a postgraduate course.
- [Theatre stage manager](#) - responsible for ensuring that rehearsals and actual performances run smoothly in terms of timing, props and technical coordination. May have drama training, come from vocational courses or begin as an assistant stage manager.
- [Broadcast presenter](#) - hosts radio or TV shows or provides the announcements and continuity links between these. Often has some form of drama training or experience or comes to this role after a performance career.
- [Higher education lecturer](#) or [Further education lecturer](#) - lectures on the practical and academic aspects of the performing arts. Often works part time and carries on a performance or production career.

Although some of the jobs listed here might not be first jobs for many graduates, they are among the many realistic possibilities with your degree, provided you can demonstrate you have the attributes employers are looking for. Bear in mind that it's not just your degree discipline that determines your options. Remember that many graduate vacancies don't specify particular degree disciplines, so don't restrict your thinking to the jobs listed here. Look at [your degree... what next?](#) for informed advice on career planning and graduate employment, or take a look at [what jobs would suit me?](#), a helpful starting point for self-analysis.

[Explore types of jobs](#) to find out more about the above options and related jobs.

## Career areas

In 2008, six months after graduation, just over two thirds of drama graduates were in full- or part-time work, with a further 6% combining work and study. Of these, around 25% were working in the area of art, design and culture. Just under two thirds of dance graduates had entered full- or part-time work, with another 11% combining work and further study. Of these, 22% had gone into the art, design and culture sector with a further 18% working as education professionals.

It is uncommon - though not impossible - to find work as soon as you leave your degree. As the figures show, a relatively small number of dance and drama graduates go straight into the arts sector and their stay there may be short-lived. Once the show is over, you need to start looking for work all over again, reinventing yourself and marketing your skills anew.

Some performing arts graduates, particularly dancers, choose to work in education - teaching, training and coaching - often while

building up a performance career. The same is true of those who take casual jobs in shops, bars, cafes and offices. Keep attending classes, watch other performers at work and be ready to seize opportunities as they arise.

Other career areas open to performing arts graduates include retail, finance, social work, travel and tourism and marketing.

## Where are the jobs?

Common employers of performing arts graduates include:

- local government;
- arts organisations;
- education institutions;
- industry;
- the National Health Service (NHS);
- leisure companies;
- voluntary organisations.

Short-term or freelance contracts, moving between different fields, generating opportunities through networking, attending auditions, collaborating with other artists and putting on your own shows are all part of a performer's lifestyle.

For an insight into more potential roles and employment areas take a look at:

- [Creative arts](#);
- [Education](#);
- [Retail](#).

See [industry insights](#) for further information on possibilities in other employment areas.

Statistics are collected every year by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (<http://www.hesa.ac.uk>) to show what HE students do immediately after graduation. These can be a useful guide but, in reality, with the data being collected within just six months of graduation, many graduates are travelling, waiting to start a course, paying off debts, getting work experience or still deciding what they want to do. For further information about some of the areas of employment commonly entered by graduates of any degree discipline, check out [what do graduates do?](#) and [your degree...what next?](#)

## Further study

In 2008, six months after graduation, 10% of drama and 13% of dance graduates had gone on to further study, with a further 6% (drama) and almost 10% (dance) combining work with further study. Part-time study is increasingly popular because you can earn and learn at the same time.

You may want to specialise further, learn additional performance skills or do academic research into an aspect of your subject that interests you. Alternatively, you may take a vocational course, such as a diploma in arts administration or a teaching certificate, that will open up alternative areas of employment.

Continuing your education while taking the first steps to becoming established can ease the transition from student to professional performer. It also means that the opportunity to take part in student competitions and festivals is still open: many dancers, actors and musicians have started their careers through this route.

These trends show only what previous graduates in your subject did immediately upon graduating. Over the course of their career - the first few years in particular - many others will opt for some form of further study, either part time or full time. If further study interests you, start by thinking [about postgrad study](#). [Find courses and research](#) of interest to you; you can also [apply for courses online](#).

Look at [funding my further study](#) for details relating to finance and the application process.

## What next?

Very few performers are lucky enough to be in continuous employment, so you will become used to mixing and matching different jobs. This includes unrelated work such as office temping or bar work in order to pay the rent.

Some graduates choose to move into technical roles in the theatre or film industries and sometimes into TV and radio - often as researchers - or on to writing, producing and directing their own work and that of others.

This should have started you thinking about your future. Whether you are in the early stages of career planning, or you have definite ideas about what you want to do, you will find further information to help you in the following sections:

- Analyse your skills, interests and motivations to find out [what jobs would suit me?](#)
- [Explore types of jobs](#) to find out about entry requirements, salaries and working conditions.
- See [industry insights](#) for hints on breaking into various industries.
- [Find graduate employers](#) and see what they have to offer.
- You may want to investigate [self-employment](#) or [flexible working](#).
- Look at the advice on [applications, CVs and interviews](#).
- Get [work experience](#) through vacation work or a work placement.
- [Find courses and research](#) and investigate postgraduate study opportunities.
- If you are thinking about taking time out, volunteering or travelling consider a [gap year](#) or explore [working and studying abroad](#).
- If you have already graduated, get online [interactive advice](#).
- Visit [your university careers service](#) for a wealth of advice and resources to help with your career planning.

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